

March 6, 2009

## West Des Moines forgoes road money from stimulus plan

By *JARED STRONG*

*jstrong@dmreg.com*

West Des Moines will get none of the \$27.5 billion federal stimulus money earmarked for road construction projects, officials said.

The city expected to get \$2 million to reconstruct Grand Avenue between Railroad Avenue and Fuller Road, but city leaders decided to forgo the money as a favor to neighboring communities.

The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, which will distribute about \$16.7 million for road and trail projects in the metro area, approved a list of 19 projects in 13 cities in January that exceeded the expected amount. Agency leaders said they did that in case one of the projects didn't meet federal requirements or if the amount of money increased.

Consequently, at least one of the projects had to be dropped from the plan.

"To make it easier for everybody we just gave our stimulus money back," said City Councilman Ted Ohmart, who is chairman of the agency. "It will help alleviate that extra two or three meetings and having to cut projects."

West Des Moines will still get \$2 million for the Grand Avenue project, but it will come from a federal program that directs money to states, said Zac Bitting, an agency planner.

"The only difference is that they won't have to spend it immediately," Bitting said.

Because the city won't have to borrow \$2 million for the project, reconstruction of Grand south to the Raccoon River Park entrance will happen sooner, said Scott Sanders, assistant city manager. Grand Avenue will be rebuilt to Interstate Highway 35 in phases.

A lack of money "would potentially delay the project and definitely keep the next phase of Grand Avenue on hold," he said.

Congress adopted a \$787 billion stimulus package last month. Of that, the Iowa Department of Transportation will receive about \$358 million, Bitting said. The department is expected to pass on about one-third to transportation planning organizations around the state.

---